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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3471  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6798  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4525  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3148  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7669  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1745  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5080  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1286  
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INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7411

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Asad Nomination/Referendum, Mouallem, Syria/France,  
Syria/Russia, Iraq, Blair, Palestinian Territories, Peace Process  
(5/15)

¶1. Summary: The press campaign for President Asad's second term in office continues, with papers publishing articles and reports praising his policies and noting Syria's accomplishments under his rule. A curious electoral sidelight is the report on the website of the opposition National Salvation Front that a would-be opposition presidential candidate has filed papers to become a presidential candidate.

Papers reported FM Mouallem's meeting in Brussels on May 14 with the Committee for "Activating the Arab Peace Initiative" and the European Union's Foreign Ministers' Council. In these meetings Mouallem renewed Syria's commitment to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, based on the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative, and said that Arab-EU cooperation restores hope in the possibility of realizing peace. He expressed hope that "efforts can shift words to deeds; the factor of time is particularly important in this regard." Arab Ministers referred to the importance of the international community helping find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict without imposing criteria that distinguish one party from another. They added that the international community has to oblige Israel to stop practices aiming at changing reality, including building of settlements and separation walls and excavations under the al-Aqsa mosque. Later, FM Mouallem held separate closed-door meetings in Brussels with the German and Norwegian Foreign Ministers, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Jonas Gahr Stre, about resuming the peace process.

Papers also reported FM Mouallem's meeting in Brussels on May 14 with British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett. They discussed relations between Syria and Britain and developments in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon. The importance of Iraq's unity and independence and of achieving security and stability in the country, and the need to achieve national reconciliation were emphasized. With regard to the Arab-Israel conflict and the Arab peace plan, the two sides stressed the need to implement relevant Security Council resolutions and the importance of working to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region, as this serves the interests of all parties. They also discussed the need to urge all Lebanese parties to overcome the existing crisis in Lebanon. FM Mouallem had similar discussions on May 14 with Spanish FM Miguel Angel Moratinos.

On Syrian-French relations, papers reported PM Ottri's meeting on May 14 with Lucien Bitterlin, Chairman of the Arab-French Solidarity Association. Talks focused on the latest regional and international developments and on relations of friendship and culture between the Syrian and French peoples.

Papers also featured a statement in Moscow on May 14 by Anatoly Yogorin, Chairman of the Scientific Center for Russian-Arab Dialogue, to the Syrian Arab News Agency, praising Syria's foreign policy under President Asad. He said that recent developments have shown that the US has begun to recognize the correctness of Syrian positions, referring to the meeting of Foreign Minister Mouallem with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Sharm al-Sheikh. "The time has come for Washington to engage in dialogue with Syria, which has a policy of peace and plays a pivotal role in the region," he concluded.

End of summary.

## 12. Selected Headlines:

"Political and media figures and circles renew their appreciation of Syria's Policy: President Asad is leader of the national project and most capable to pursue a victorious march" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/15)

"An unprecedented incident: Syrian lawyer nominates himself for the presidency" (Free Syria Website, 5/15)

"In Brussels, Foreign Minister Mouallem meets British Spanish, German and Norwegian Foreign Ministers. Mouallem expresses hope that efforts can shift words to deeds. Muoallem confirms: Syrian-European cooperation revives hope for achieving peace"

(Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/15)

"Chairman of the Scientific Center for Russian-Arab Dialogue, Anatoly Yogorin: Syria deserves congratulations for renewing President Asad's presidency" (Government-owned Tishree, 5/15)

"PM Ottri discusses regional and international developments with Lucien Bitterlin, Chairman of the Arab-French Solidarity Association" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/15)

"Ten US and Danish soldiers killed and injured in Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/15)

"Palestinian Minister of Interior Kawasmeh submits his resignation. Hanieh serves as Interior Minister until a replacement is named. The Palestinian Authority warns against a conspiracy to separate the West Bank from the Palestinian Territories. Perets: Occupying the Gaza Strip is a matter of time" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/15)

## 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"A New Stage for a Better Future"  
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Dr. Ibrahim Zu'ayr, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (5/15): "President Asad spent seven years of nonstop work to change and develop Syria toward new hopes for a better future.

"Syrians have the right to be proud that their President Asad expresses their ambitions for a homeland regaining the last inch of its occupied Golan, a homeland that has always been too strong to be harmed from within or from outside, a homeland standing fast in the face of the strong black winds that blow from every direction....

"The Syrian people will today say yes to a new presidential term for their president, who, with his mind and wisdom, embodies the hopes of Arabs for unity against the Zionist tyrants and their American allies...."

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"A Later Frost"  
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An unsigned editorial in independent English-language monthly "Syria Today" (May, 2007) reads: "The last month has been something of curate's egg. On the international front Syria received visits from high-profile figures including the Speaker of US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, and the new head of the UN Ban Ki-Moon. After years of isolation, Syria seems to be making strides to rehabilitate its reputation in the West although the international tribunal on the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafki al-Hariri, is an ongoing blot on Syria's half-year report card....

"Domestically, however, Syria has witnessed lackluster parliamentary elections. The ruling Baath Party built on its entrenched position and voter turnout was far higher than expected (56 percent), but the contest was largely characterized by a certain froideur....

"With an eye on the Presidential referendum, which is expected to be held by the end of the month, the fact that the National Progressive Front increased its majority in the People's Assembly should pave the way for a triumphant renewal of President Asad's mandate for a second term....

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"Quick Sands"  
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Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (5/15): "The US Administration made a mistake from the very beginning when it launched the war on Iraq, made another mistake in the management of the occupation in the past four years, and is now making a bigger mistake in the way it is addressing its previous mistakes....

"Syria was the first country to warn against the perils of the Iraq invasion.... President Asad was the first to warn against sinking in the Iraqi mud, and the American officials definitely remember this....

"Syria's warning was based on its direct contact with the affairs of the region and wide and accurate knowledge of the Iraqi situation and its domestic complications....

"Syria has always worked to help Iraqis overcome their suffering.... Today Syria hosts about 2 million Iraqis who have fled the inferno in their country...."

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"Wishes Are Insufficient to Achieve Peace"  
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Ali Sawahah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (5/15): "Peace has never been Israel's choice, because Israel was created in the heart of the Arab region by the West in general, not to be a message of civilization, fairness, and development for the peoples of the region, but to be, as it has proven since its creation, a message of treachery and coercion to tear this nation apart....

"Arabs have no confidence that the United States and Europe can apply any pressure on Israel to force it to accept a just peace...."

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"Fall of Last Ally"  
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Nadya Dimyati, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (5/15): "Tony Blair is the latest European leader to pay the price of the alliance with Washington...."

"Blair supported the United States and Israel in the criminal July war against Lebanon and ignored calls by most of his party leaders for a cease-fire...."

"The phantom of war will haunt Blair, who left a heavy legacy for his successor...."

Corbin